

about a quarter of a billion dollars; it is now up to half a billion dollars. And the completion date, I would bet you, before it is over, will slip to sometime in 2007. I just continue to think it is a ridiculous, overblown use of taxpayers money.

But there is something else in this bill that really bugs me. I happen to believe that the number one national disgrace in this country is the fact that some 44 million people are struggling every day without health care coverage. There is a provision in this bill which enables a study to go forward to see whether or not we will add supplemental health and dental benefits for Members of Congress under our health care plan.

Now, I happen to believe that congressional employees should have dental coverage, and I think that Members of Congress should have dental coverage. But I also think that every citizen of this country ought to have access to health care and ought to have decent dental coverage.

We just marked up the Labor-Health-Education appropriations bill; and in contrast to the consideration that we are going to give Members of Congress about adding new health care benefits, what did the committee do this morning with respect to health care benefits for the rest of Americans?

I will tell you: the chairman's mark on the Labor-Health-Education bill today entirely terminates the Community Access Program, which is the glue that makes health delivery to the poor work in 70 communities in this country.

The chairman's mark cut several other programs. It cuts Rural Health Outreach grants, which support primary health care, dental care and mental health and telemedicine projects. It cuts those projects by 24 percent.

The Maternal and Child Health Care block grant is only 2.9 percent above the fiscal 2001 level, which means that we have a 10 percent loss of purchasing power for that program for average Americans.

Then, if you go on, you see that childhood immunization, the cost to immunize a child has gone up by 24 percent since 2001. Appropriations have increased by only 15 percent. So we are having a growing gap in terms of our ability to immunize children in this country.

So it just seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that there is a substantial gap between what we are willing to consider doing for the average American when it comes to health care and what we are willing to consider doing for Members of Congress.

I do not want to vote to deny health care coverage of any kind to anybody, but I want to say this to the majority in this House: if you vote for this legislative appropriations bill today, by God, do not dare to bring out an expansion of health care benefits for Members of Congress until you have also brought out legislation to this floor

that covers health care for every American. And make sure that those Americans have the same kind of coverage, including dental care, that you would like to see for the average Member of Congress. Unless you do that, you will be giving hypocrisy a bad name.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I feel certain that the gentleman was not referring specifically to me, because I do not have Federal health insurance.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN).

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New York for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that I plan to vote for this bill, but there is no way I can support this rule.

There were a total of eight amendments submitted. There were seven by Democrats, one by a Republican. The one by the Republican was allowed. Only one out of the seven submitted by Democrats was allowed.

A lot of them had no political overtones whatsoever. What is wrong, for example, with studying ways to improve and expand day care services on the Hill for our employees? That is hardly political. The only thing I can imagine is wrong is that a Member of the majority did not think of it; and I am sure if they had, it would have been made in order. But that should have been allowed, to study it.

Now, I acknowledge that at least four of the amendments have some political overtones, and I can appreciate the embarrassment that Members of the majority must experience when their legislative actions stretch the bounds of proper rules and procedures of the House.

How long, I think we know how long, what, 3 hours we kept that vote open on Medicare prescription drugs. We have subsequently read about all of the promises and the threats that were thrown back and forth to change the result, successfully, I might add.

Then, on a separate issue, how often have we seen conference agreements completed before the conference was even convened? The gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) had every right to bring our attention to that abuse of power.

I doubt the majority would have approved any of those amendments, but they should have been debated.

Then there are the two amendments by the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN). First, should C-SPAN tapes be rebroadcast for political purposes? I am not sure, but I think it is something that ought to be discussed on the floor of the House, and I regret the fact that we did not get an opportunity to discuss it.

He had a second amendment to curb another potential abuse of power. I think it could be a pretty serious one.

It is inappropriate to use the franking privilege out of committee resources to mail mass propaganda pieces on behalf of any Member, on the majority or the minority side.

Now, if you look at the numbers that we have, the Committee on Resources apparently has asked for about half a million dollars to be mailing pieces into other Members' districts. We saw the explanation by the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN). No matter how much we want to cooperate with the other side, this is a major potential abuse of power, if somebody does not stand up and say wait a minute, there is something wrong with this.

This has to be discussed. The public needs to be aware of it before we embark on this. Of course, if nothing is said, other committees are likely to do the same thing, and no ranking member has that ability.

So this was an amendment that really needed to be discussed, and perhaps in that discussion we could get an explanation that would show us that this is not as abusive as it appears at first glance. Perhaps there is a logical explanation, but we sure ought to get that kind of explanation. The fact that we were denied the opportunity to discuss this is reason enough to vote against the rule.

What we are looking for is fairness. We are looking for the resources in this bill to continue this great institution at a reasonable level, a fiscally responsible level, one that is acceptable to both sides. But when the process is clearly not acceptable to both sides, I think we have an obligation to stand up and say no.

I would like to see some support from the other side of the aisle for raising objection to the way in which this rule was put together.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am in no way trying to defend or impugn any question of what the Committee on Resources did, but I think the appropriate place to have a look at that is through the Committee on House Administration or through the bipartisan Committee on Franking. I expect that will be done. Not on the floor of the House.

I know they do not want to miss an opportunity to make political hay over this, but the fact of the matter is, this is an inappropriate place to have that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN).

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, let me thank my friend from New York for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, let me take this time just to express my disappointment with this rule and my opposition to it. I listen frequently where Members of Congress like to say that we do not want to treat ourselves differently than we treat the general public. Yet